

Ministries agree to allow 7 Himalayan hydel projects

But activists flag frequent floods in Himalayan region

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Six months after a devastating flood of rock, ice and debris gushed down the Rishiganga river in Uttarakhand and killed at least 200 and severely damaged two hydropower projects, three Union Ministries, which initially had dissenting views on the future of hydroelectric power projects, have come to a consensus.

According to an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court



An excavator at the tunnel of the flood-hit Tapovan project in February 2021.

this month, as part of an ongoing case on the feasibility of hydroelectric projects in the aftermath of the 2013 Uttarakhand floods, seven projects have been allowed to complete construction primarily on the grounds that they were over “50% complete.” They include the 512 MW Tapovan project

that was severely damaged.

No other new projects would be allowed in the upper reaches of the Ganga and those sanctioned would have to abide by environment regulations that prescribe a minimum flow in the river at all times.

In 2016, the Union Water Ministry, then led by Uma Bharti, had contested the establishment of these projects and taken a position opposed to the Environment and Jal Shakti Ministries. However, in 2019, documents show, the Ministry had changed its views to accommodate seven projects.

The affidavit this month is the first formal document

that reveals all three Ministries to be on the same page.

The seven projects are the Tehri Stage 2, Tapovan Vishnugadh, Vishnugadh Pipalkoti, Singoli Bhatwari, Phata Bhuyang, Madhyamaheshwar and Kaliganga 2.

Activists say the government’s pushing ahead with the projects revealed that the floods of February had failed to jolt the government into realising that hydropower development in the Himalayas was “illogical”.

“There were two projects, Singoli Bhatwari and Phata Bhuyang, which were specifically linked to the Kedarnath tragedy. Both have been allowed. The Vishnu-

gadh project damaged in the February floods too has been allowed to progress even though 200 plus people died due to the criminal negligence of there not being a disaster warning system. The affidavit has the government admitting that the floods have damaged the tunnels and topography of the projects. All of this has changed. These projects got their environmental clearance based on very different conditions. So how are they being allowed on the same environmental clearance?” questioned Mallika Bhanot, a critic of hydropower development in the Himalayas.